The Japanese Translation of the Bible

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THE JAPANESE TRANSLATION

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MEETING TO CELEBRATE ITS COMPLETION.

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THE JAPANESE TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE.

A meeting to celebrate the completion of the translation of the Bible into Japanese, was held on the 3rd February in the Shin Sakai Church, Tsukiji, Tokyo. There was a large gathering of foreigners and Japanese, the church being filled. J. C. Hepburn, M.D., LL.D, occupied the chair. The meeting was opened by the Right Rev. Bishop Williams, reading the XIX. Psalm. The same Psalm was read in Japanese by Mr. Honda. After prayer had been offered by Rev. James Williams, C.M.S., a short address in Japanese was given by Rev. J. T. Ise (Congregationalist).

Dr. HEPBURN then said—Dear Christian friends; as Chairman of the Permanent Committee, I have the very great pleasure of making the public announcement that the work of translating and publishing the Scriptures of the Old Testament, which was committed to this Committee by the Convention of Protestant Missionaries assembled in Tokyo, in the spring of 1878, has at length, after a labour of nearly ten years, been, through the good hand of our God upon us,

successfully completed; and I now hold a copy of it in my hand. Something of the history and progress of the work of translating the Old Testament may not be uninteresting, and this I will endeavour to give as briefly as possible. While the Yokohama Committee, appointed by the Convention of 1872, were still engaged upon the work of translating and publishing the New Testament, the Protestant Missionaries of the various Societies residing in Tokyo, met on the 30th of October, 1876, for the purpose of "taking some action in regard to translating the Old Testament." The result of this meeting was the formation of a Committee of Translation consisting of four members viz., Rev. Messrs. Thompson, Waddell, Piper, and Cochran. This Committee met at regular times, and after about a year's work completed the translation of the first eleven chapters of Genesis, which were also published. During this time also, Rev. Messrs. Wright, Shaw, and Blanchet commenced the translation of the book of Isaiah, and made a first draft of about twenty-five chapters, when the work was given up, owing to the return home of Messrs. Wright and Blanchet. The Rev. J. Piper during this time also translated the books of Jonah, Haggai, and Malachi, and had them published. This Committee, in June, 1878, in view of the arrangements made by the Convention of Protestant Missionaries which met in Tokyo in May of the same year, was dissolved by the mutual consent of its members, and their work, together with their minutes, were transferred to the Permanent Committee appointed by that Convention. This Convention met in Tokyo on the 10th and 13th days of May, 1878, in pursuance of a call originally issued by the Missionaries of the

A.B.C.F.M. It was constituted of delegates from all the Protestant Missionary Societies represented in Japan at that time. Its principal object was "to further the work of translating the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and to make some arrangements for it." The result of this Convention was the formation of a Permanent Committee on the translation of the Old Testament; the Committee to consist of one member from each of the Missionary Societies represented in Japan. It was empowered with authority to select and appoint a Committee for translating the Old Testament, and also a Committee of Revision. The Permanent Committee originally consisted of the following members: — Revs. S. R. Brown, Nathan Brown, D. C. Greene, Quimby, Maclay, Cochran, Piper, Wright, Waddell, Goble, Krecker, and Dr. Hepburn. This Committee met and was organized on October 23rd of the same year, 1878, by the election of Dr. Hepburn as Chairman, and Rev. G. Cochran as Secretary; and proceeded at once to make arrangements for entering upon the work committed to them. As it was felt to be extremely desirable to have the Scriptures of the Old Testament translated and published as soon as possible, to facilitate the work, the Committee adopted the plan of assigning portions of the Old Testament to local committees of Missionaries residing in the various ports of Hakodate, Tokyo, Yokohama, Niigata, Kobe, Ozaka, Kiyoto, and Nagasaki. Different portions of the Old Testament were accordingly assigned to Committees in eac h of the above places, and the translations were to be sent to a Revising Committee appointed by the Permanent Committee for this purpose.

Under this arrangement, Mr. Fyson of Niigata sent in a translation of the book of Joshua; Mr. Dening of Hakodate sent a translation of 1st and 2nd Samuel, but, these being returned to him for more careful revision, they were not again returned to the Permanent Committee. Mr. Davidson also sent in a translation of 2nd Kings, Mr. Thompson of Genesis, and Dr. Hepburn of Proverbs. All these books were carefully revised, corrected, and afterwards published. But this plan of translating by local Committees was found not to succeed; as with the above exceptions, none of the Missionaries responded to the request of the Permanent Committee. Thus about four years were spent in vain expectation of better results. Consequently the Permanent Committee, at a meeting in January 1882, adopted a different arrangement, appointing three of its members as translators, viz., Rev. Dr. Verbeck, Rev. P. K. Fyson, and Dr. Hepburn. Dr. D. C. Greene was also appointed, but declined to serve owing to other important duties, and his residing so far from the other members of the Committee. Besides acting as a translating committee, these three persons were appointed also as a Revising Committee; thus every book that was translated passed under the revision of at least two of the members. As it was understood that our Japanese brethren, with a very natural and commendable ambition, were desirous of participating in the work of translating the sacred Scriptures, at the Conference held in Osaka, in April, 1883, it was recommended that the Permanent Committee "give their careful consideration to any communication which it might receive from the native church in reference to old Testament translations." Accordingly, after considerable cor-

respondence, in the following year, 1884, a standing committee and a committee of three translators were appointed by an assembly of the native brethren. The translating committee consisted of Messrs. Matsuyama, Uemura, and Ibuka, but owing to a want of support from the native churches, and other important duties pressing upon some of the members, and especially the want of acquaintance with the original text, the committee were not able to accomplish what they had hoped to do, and were finally dissolved of their own accord, and ceased to co-operate as a committee in the year following, 1886, after having translated about half of the book of Lamentations, and made some critical notes on Dr. Hepburn's translations of the books of Hosea and Joel. The failure of our native brethren, however, did not interfere with the progress of the work in the hand of the Permanent Committee. The time and something of the order in which the several books of the Old Testament were translated and afterwards published is as follows:—in 1882, Joshua, Jonah, Haggai, Malachi and Proverbs; 1883, Genesis, I. and II. Samuel, I. Kings, and Jeremiah; 1884, Judges, Ruth, II. Kings, Ezekiel, Exodus, Ecclesiastes, Leviticus, and Numbers; 1885, Denteronomy, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and Zechariah; 1886, Job and Esther; 1887, I. and II. Chron, Ezra, Nehemiah, Isaiah, Psalms, Lamentations, and Song of Solomon. This year also the books of Genesis, Joshua, Proverbs, Jonah, Haggai, and Malachi were put through a second revision and published. The Permanent Committee cannot but regret that almost ten years should have elasped since it was

organized to take this work in hand, ere it was brought to completion. It has had to encounter many difficulties. Its very desire to expedite the work, at first only proved a hindrance, and postponed its accomplishment. Besides, sickness, attended with unavoidable absence, and other necessary engagements of the members of the translating committee, caused serious interruptions. Still, we cannot but see that the delay which we regretted has resulted in much benefit to the character and quality of our work. Although it was perhaps not so contemplated by the Convention that gave the authority, it was found impossible to form any other Committee of Revision, than by appointing the same persons who were engaged in translating, to this office. This also has proved to be a great advantage, in that it has been the means of securing greater uniformity of style, and oneness in the various books. The style of the Old Testament has been made to conform to that of the New, so that there is complete uniformity in this respect; as much, I may say, as if both translations had been the work of one person. This has been effected mainly through that kind Providence which furnished the Committee with the same two native assistants, Mr. Matsuyama and Mr. Takahashi Goro, who were such invaluable helpers to the Yokohama Committee in translating the New Testament. These brethren, both Christian men, and accomplished scholars in their own language, sat with the Yokohama Committee throughout the six years and more during which they were engaged upon the New Testament, and where they received the training which made them such efficient workers in the work upon the Old

Testament, and enabled the Committee to attain uniformity and agreement in the style and character of the whole book, quite equal to that of the Revised English version. This is indeed a a matter for which we, and also the Christian people of Japan, have great reason for congratulation and thanksgiving. May I not also add that we have every reason to believe the pure native and simple style and language of this sacred Book, so easily understood by the most unlearned, so chaste and free from Chinese and foreign terms, and read by the millions of this people, will have a powerful influence in preserving the native tongue in its purity, much like what has been done for the English language, by the pure Anglo-Saxon of the English Bible. I may state further in regard to this translation that the Committee has endeavoured to adhere faithfully and as literally as possible to the Hebrew original, desiring not only to give its true meaning, but also to retain the beautiful and instructive figurative language in which God has conveyed his mind to the children of men. In all obscure and difficult passages they have sought light from every available source; from such ancient and modern versions as were at hand; from the best critical and grammatical works, and especially comparing their work with the revised version of the English Scriptures, as embodying the renderings of the most scholarly men of the time. They have had no peculiar difficulty in their work, except it be in finding satisfactory equivalents for some of the animals, birds, insects, trees, flowers, and precious stones mentioned in the Bible; but they trust that in these respects also they have attained to the true meaning as nearly as most of the modern

versions. As to the names of the Hebrew weights, measures, and months, instead of endeavouring to reduce them to their equivalent values in Japanese, they have followed the method adopted in the translation of the New Testament, and I believe, of all other versions, of merely transferring the Hebrew term into Japanese kana. The Committee would not forget, on this occasion, thankfully to acknowledge the cordial sympathy extended to them by the British and Foreign Bible Society, and the National Bible Society of Scotland, as well as the Christian liberality with which they bore the necessary expenses incurred in the work of translating the Old Testament, just as the American Bible Society had previously so generously extended to the Yokohama Committee in their work of translating the New Testament. And now, my Christian brethren, it only remains for me to take this translation of the Old Testament, the work of the Permanent Committee, unite it with the translation of the New Testament, the work of the Yokohama Committee, into one Bible in the name of the whole body of Protestant Missionaries in Japan, and I may say, of the whole Church of Christ in America and England, and make it a loving present to the Japanese nation. What more precious gift, more precious than mountains of silver and gold, could the Christian people of the West bestow on the people of this land! May this sacred book be to the Japanese what it has been to the people of the West, a fountain of life, a messenger of joy and peace, the foundation of a true civilization, of social and political prosperity and greatness. May it be to them like the river which Ezekiel saw proceeding out from the throne of God, which, wherever it

flowed, brought life and healing. And shall we not now call upon our souls, and all that is within us, to thank our God and Father for this, his wonderful gift to the children of men, that in his loving kindness he has sent it to this people."

On the desk was lying a beautifully bound copy of the whole Bible in five volumes presented to Dr. Hepburn by the National Bible Society of Scotland, on the last day of last year, immediately after the completion of the translation.

In the course of his remarks, Dr. Hepburn, suiting the action to the word, took the New Testament in one hand, and the Old Testament in the other, and reverently placing them together laid the book down—a complete Bible. Knowing that he had spent the last sixteen years almost entirely on this work, and knowing the deep interest which he has in it, the audience was visibly moved at the simple but touching action which seemed to unite the work of the two Committees into one.

The Rev. G. F. VERBECK, D.D. gave an address in Japanese, which was practically a translation of the above.

The Rev. Geo. COCHRAN, D.D., on being called on by the Chairman said—The history of versions of Holy Scripture is interwoven with the history of the progress of the Kingdom of God. This is amply shown in the appearing of the more noted versions in important crises of the providential history of mankind. When the canon of Old Testament Scripture was duly closed, and the living waters of Divine Revelation were about to burst beyond the narrow limits within which hitherto they had been long confined, all things were by the hand of Providence prepared and

ready for the great event. The dispersion of the Hebrew people carrying with them their sacred writings amongst the nations round about; the diffusion of the Messianic hope, kindling afresh the desire of the nations to study it for themselves; the spread of the Greek language, the fittest medium of the time in literature and civilization; these gave the occasion and provided the channel for the first great version of Holy Scripture, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, known as the Septuagint, which spread over many nations the dawn of an auspicious day, that quickly brightened and broadened into noon, as the "Sun of Righteousness," in the New Testament, flung the splendour of perfected revelation upon the world. Then, as Christian evangelism moved outward in obedience to the divine command, from Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria toward the ends of the earth, the way of the gospel messenger was prepared by the Syriac versions in the East, and by the Latin versions in the West. These were followed by others, for example, the Coptic, Gothic, Saxon, of less importance it may be, because of narrower range, but which seemed to spread and to perpetuate the knowledge of the truth during the paralysis of progress and the eclipse of faith that fell upon the Church in the mediæval night of Christendom. I need not tell you at length for you know so well, it was the translation of the Bible into the vernacular, and its circulation amongst the people, that brought back the thrill of life and inaugurated the era of evangelism, which has continued with increasing power to the present day. Luther's version, upon which, in the maturity of his strength, he spent twelve loving, earnest, laborious years, furnished a people's book, to which

the language, literature, and national growth of the German empire is more indebted than to any other agency whatever. The English bible in the version of King James has rendered a similar service to all who use the English tongue. It has created the magnificent structure which we proudly call our English literature. In the latter part of the eighteenth century, through the power of an evangelical revival, Christianity renewed her youth, as in the days when apostles preached and martyrs bled; the church awoke to a sense of her responsibility to obey her Lord's command, "Go preach the Gospel to every creature, disciple all the nations." Then were organized those mighty agencies, the missionary and Bible Societies of Christendom, that like twin sisters, fellow handmaids waiting upon our Lord, shall not rest, nor be discouraged until the word of life is in the hands of every creature upon earth, and the preacher of the word shall tell the story of God's love in Christ to every one who has an ear to hear. India was given in charge to the English nation, not simply as a source of wealth, or as a stage for the display of statemanship and power, but that in addition to a government on the whole beneficent there might come to the millions of that vast peninsula the blessings of an open Bible in the vernacular, and the preaching of the gospel of the grace of God. In this the highest ministry of man's goodwill toward man, the English speaking people of Britain and America unite their strength, and the result of their endeavour may be seen in the moral change quietly but surely spreading the sunshine of Christian civilization over the face of that fair land, which shall yet rejoice and blossom as the garden of the Lord. China, the num-

ber of whose millions we toss lightly off our tongues, but of whose deep distress as she has lain for ages inswathed in the mummy cerements of a strange and meaningless conservatism, we can form but a faint conception, has also received the word of God in several well adapted versions; and though the progress of the gospel is sadly hindered through prejudice engendered by the opium traffic and the coolie trade, the day of her redemption draweth nigh; the dawn already shudders through the gloom; the voice of life and hope is heard throughout the land. Japan, at peace with all the world, appropriating with swift and ready adaptation to the genius of her people the material and intellectual civilization of the West, in a manner which excites the wonder and delight of all observers, and they are legion, has in the year of grace just closed received in the vernacular of her thirty-seven millions a complete version of Holy Scripture, the united gift of American and British scholarship and Christian love. Only a few years ago the ploughshare of revolution passed through the land, freshly turning up the generous soil. By the open furrows gathered quickly a numerous band of gospel husbandmen, waiting ready to cast in the imperishable seed. The translators have put into the hands of these husbandmen the seed basket, full, replenished for all time; now the labourers may broad cast this seed, the Word of God, wherever they will, and it shall surely grow; watered by the dews of Heaven, nourished by the Sun of Righteousness, it will be ready soon, and they who have sown and they who reap shall rejoice together over the abundant harvest gathered for the garner of the Lord. Who can estimate the value of the gift, the word of God

in the vernacular, given to this whole nation; henceforth it is the people's book; its principles of holy truth and love shall weave themselves into the thought and speech and life of each successive generation, they shall enter into the new imperial constitution, into the laws and customs of the land; and by virtue of their healing, quickening power, this ancient empire shall put on moral strength and may endure with vigour till the last courses of the sun. We may well rejoice together as Christians of this and other lands while we give thanks to Almighty God for his watchful care over the faithful men who have laboured patiently and with success at their noble task. We congratulate them here to-day, upon the happy issue of their toil. They have wrought a work which cannot perish: a work which forms an accumulating moral treasure increasing the sum of human happiness while life and thought and being last or immortality endures. He who can pursue the swift silent sunbeam and trace without omission every lineament of grace and beauty which it paints upon the leaf and flower and living thing, may tell the blessings that accrue as the light of life is cast upon the pathway of the millions whom otherwise the darkness had bewildered and destroyed. Every letter in the record of this version of God's word shall be a regenerated soul, every stone in its testimonial shall be a redeemed family, every note in its pæan an angel's joy. "All flesh is grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth and the flower thereof falleth away; but the word of the Lord endureth forever;" and this is the word presented now, in the vernacular of the people, a free gift to the empire of Japan.

After a short address in Japanese from the Rev. Mr. INAGAKI, Pastor of the Kaigan Church, Yokohama, prayer was offered by the Rev. Mr. OKUNO, Paster of the Church in Yokosuka, and the benediction was pronounced by the Rev. JULIUS SOPER, American Methodist Episcopal Mission.

During the meeting several pieces of sacred music were rendered in good style by a choir of Japanese young ladies.

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